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SUBJECT: UK Foreign Secretary Miliband Discusses Best Practices with
Kunar Governor Wahidi

Summary

1. (SBU) In a February 18 meeting, Kunar Province Governor Wahidi reviewed for visiting UK Foreign Secretary Miliband the reasons for his success in the most "kinetic" province in Afghanistan. Wahidi cited extremely close cooperation with and support from the PRT in security, governance, and development as the most critical factor, followed up by an increase in U.S. military presence, and a creative use of informal tribal shuras to keep insurgent activities contained to a few valleys and districts. Wahidi also predicted that, based on the high voter registration turnout, most Kunari residents would participate in the August 20 presidential elections. The governor identified Kunar's porous border with Pakistan, the current deficiencies in the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and a sluggish Kabul bureaucracy as his most formidable obstacles to further reform. End summary.

2. (U) During his fourth official trip to Afghanistan, UK Foreign Secretary (FS) Miliband included a stop in U.S.-led Regional Command (RC)-East to compare the UK and U.S. approaches to counter-insurgency and support for the Afghan government at the sub-national level. Following his February 17 visit to the UK-led PRT in Helmand Province, RC-East Division Commander MG Schlosser and the DCM escorted FS Miliband to PRT Asadabad in the northeastern province of Kunar on February 18 to receive a briefing by Schlosser, the DCM, the brigade commander, and the PRT integrated team. The delegation then traveled to Kunar Governor Wahidi's compound for a meeting and working lunch. FS Miliband's final stop in RC-E was a trip to the Torkham Gate Border Control Center in Nangarhar Province.

Wahidi's Best Practices for Provincial Development

3. (SBU) FS Miliband praised Governor Wahidi for his successful tenure of 14 months as governor and posed a number of questions to distill Wahidi's best practices for significantly advancing security, governance and development in the province with the highest number of violent clashes between insurgents and Coalition Forces (CF) in the country. Wahidi listed three key factors:

-- Unwavering Support from the PRT. Wahidi repeatedly said that the robust cooperation with and backing from the PRT was the foundation of his effective governorship. It may have been the governor's initiatives to revive the Provincial Coordination Committee (on security matters) and to funnel all development projects through the Provincial Development Committee, but the PRT's financial and technical support and excellent "customer service" turned these initiatives into a reality. The governor was proud to inform FS Miliband that as a result of the PRT and USG's willingness to

support -- and not parallel or dictate -- his reform agenda, corruption at the provincial and district level has been reduced, civilian casualty incidents have been minimized, and popular perception of the local government's authority is growing on his watch. The success lies not in the PRT's record spending of \$84 million in development projects, but in the application of the \$84 million to Afghan government priorities.

-- Increased U.S. troop presence. Wahidi claimed the majority of Kunaris welcomed the January deployment of an additional U.S. maneuver battalion to Kunar, mainly because of his efforts to cast in a positive light the presence of foreign troops in a province historically known for its strong resistance to outsiders. The governor takes every opportunity, including in shuras and on the local radio and television stations, to explain that the U.S. soldiers bring with them "lots of money" for economic development. Wahidi also stresses to his constituents that CF are in Kunar mainly to provide the necessary security for badly needed development projects, and will withdraw from the area when the projects are completed. He provided as an example the U.S. military withdrawal from a village when a road project was completed.

-- Isolation and marginalization of insurgents. When asked about the composition and intensity of the insurgency in Kunar, Wahidi estimated that the insurgents were loosely associated with one of "eight groups" (without offering further details). However, he posited that the vast majority of the terrorist groups' foot soldiers were in fact economically-driven youth or timber and gemstone smugglers seeking to protect their illicit activities from foreign troops. Moreover, the clashes with CF mainly occurred in a few valleys, including the Korengal and Pech valleys, and Chapa Dara and Gaziabad districts. In addition to the relatively high-paying PRT-backed economic development projects to attract fighting-age

youth away from insurgent groups, Wahidi has also established a network of unofficial shuras at the village, district, and provincial level to facilitate dialogue between official local authorities and tribal leaders.

Elections Turnout Likely to be Another Success Story

14. (SBU) Wahidi was optimistic about the voter turnout in Kunar on August 20, the date of the presidential election. Kunar ranked first in RC-E provinces (14 in total) for posting the highest number of new voters following the Voter Registration campaign. Wahidi predicted a similar turnout on election day. He added that the tribal decision-making process is democratic in nature, since the majority decision usually prevails in shuras, and Kunari residents look forward to the opportunity to participate in a process that leads to the election of their president.

Obstacles to Further Reform

15. (SBU) While clearly proud of his accomplishments and outstanding relationship with the PRT, Wahidi was equally candid about the challenges that lie ahead:

-- Unregulated border with Pakistan. Wahidi underscored the critical role that the porous, lawless 240 km border with Pakistan played in Kunar's future development and security. Kunar has been "victimized by the seven gates" (or passages) that lead from Pakistan to Kunar, and until these passages are controlled, Pakistan-based insurgents will continue to undermine the fragile political stability in the province and destabilize other parts of the country. Wahidi also noted that the unregulated border allowed the timber and gemstone smuggling to continue unabated; conversely, the establishment of border posts could generate significant tax and customs revenues for the provincial and national budgets.

-- More improvements in ANSF. Wahidi told FS Miliband that the professionalism of the Afghan Uniform Police (AUP) and Afghan Border Police (ABP) had improved over the year, thanks to CF efforts, but a further increase in quality and quantity of the local Afghan police was still needed.

-- Kunar's entanglement in Nuristan's security challenges. Wahidi

repeated his request to re-locate to Nuristan the bases of the ABP, Afghan National Army, and CF units used to conduct operations in Nuristan. He maintained that the bases adversely affected Kunar's security because they drew more insurgents from Nuristan to Kunar, when the fight for control over Nuristan should be carried out in Nuristan.

-- Lack of higher education opportunities in Kunar. Wahidi lamented that many students leave Kunar to go to Peshawar for higher education. He noted that women in particular lose opportunities because they have no higher education options in the province and their families are reluctant to send them beyond the province for education.

--- Sluggish Kabul bureaucracy. Wahidi was careful not to criticize the capacity of the line ministers in Kabul, and emphasized his support for a strong central government, but complained that Kabul ministries often took six months or longer to respond to his requests for financial or technical support. Moreover, the resources he does receive from Kabul are negligible (in comparison to PRT and U.S. Embassy resources); in recognition of the brigade's approval of CERP funds, Wahidi said "Jalalabad is the most important (city) to me."

16. (U) This cable has been reviewed by the PRT Commander.

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